PITTA

Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 14 Number 6 July 2017

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 23rd July 2017: Fox Sagar/Shamirpet. Meeting point: Punjagutta (opp. Mangatrai Pearls), 6.00AM; Suchitra Circle, Medchal Road, 6.30AM.

Fox Sagar has, of late, yielded several interesting bird sightings, and offers good prospects of productive birding. Shamirpet, too, has always been a reliable birding site offering good sightings of water birds. The grasslands surrounding the lake too usually give a good number of small grassland birds. This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Ms Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532).

INDOOR MEETING: Talk by Ismail Shariff
Thursday, 19th July 2017, 6.00PM: Hamburg Hall, Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034. (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443/23350040)

A Life Member of BSAP, Ismail is an avid photographer, specialising in landscape and nature photography in general, but predominantly in wildlife photography. He loves photographing wild cats and this passion has taken him all over India, including the mighty Himalayas, in pursuit of the elusive Snow Leopard. He will share details about his efforts over almost four years to capture 'The Ghost', and his experiences while planning and executing his expeditions.

THE PEN & THE BINOCULAR (part-1)

Humayun Taher

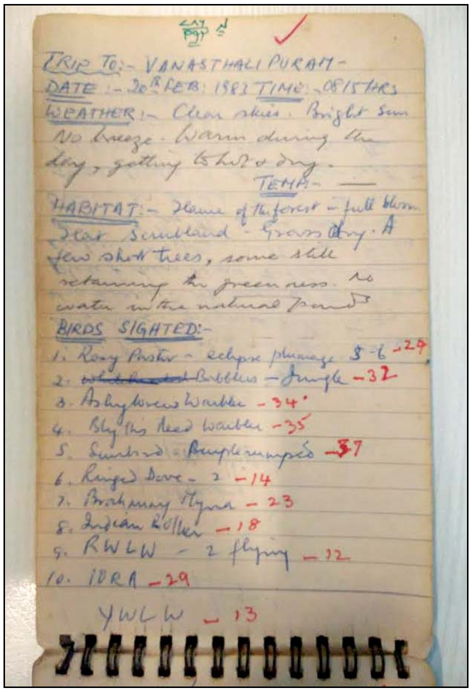
It was still dark when I was woken up by the pressure of my father's hand on my shoulder, with a whispered warning to make haste and not make noise. I still don't know how to balance these two, but what I did that day was apparently acceptable as I didn't have to listen to any lectures on the subject. A quick biscuit washed down with some water, and then bus number 127 carried us to the Koti bus stand. Kamat Hotel Koti was the habitual BSAP rendezvous in the 1980's and having reached the place, we looked eagerly for the others.

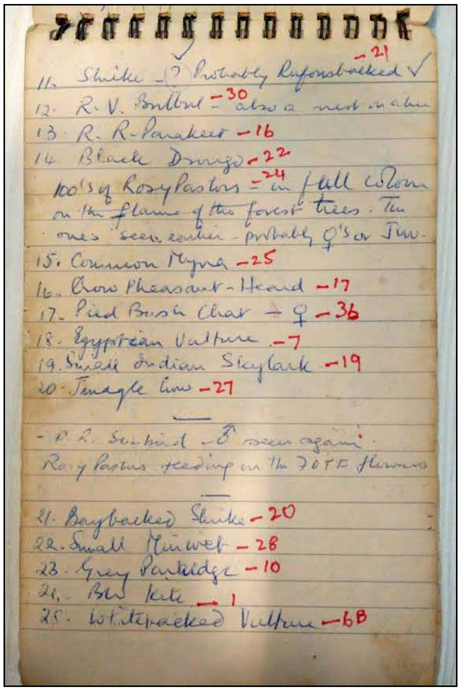
The Forest Department jeeps had not yet arrived, but Aasheesh's Ambassador was drawn up by the kerb and so we knew that he, at least, was there. Crossing the road, we purposefully made our way to the "Light of Asia" café, where, sure enough, a few members were refreshing themselves with the iconic "*Irani chai*". Alas, this wonderful institution, a more popular rendezvous than the even then defunct Kamat Hotel, has also fallen prey to the ravages of time, and the "Light of Asia" has been extinguished. I can't pass the place these days without feeling more than a twinge of nostalgia.

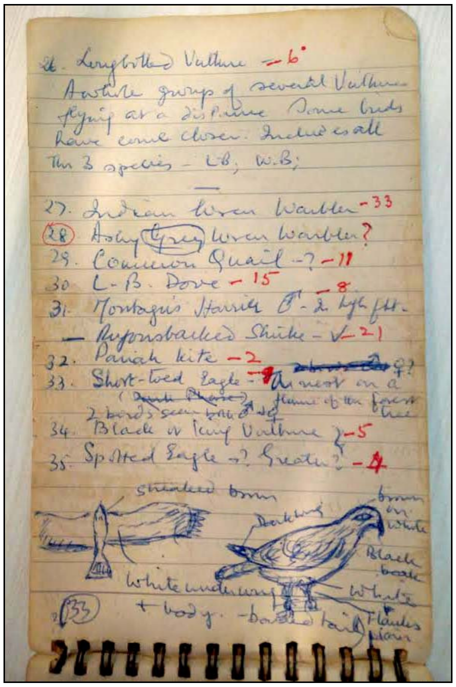
Small boys in those days were not allowed to drink tea until they had passed their tenth birthday ("*It will make your teeth rot and fall out*…"!). Happily it seems that this chemical reaction is restricted to teeth that are less than 10 years old. Having crossed this almost mythical age some little time ago, my young heart was gladdened by being allowed to partake of a steaming cup. I've kept at it ever since!

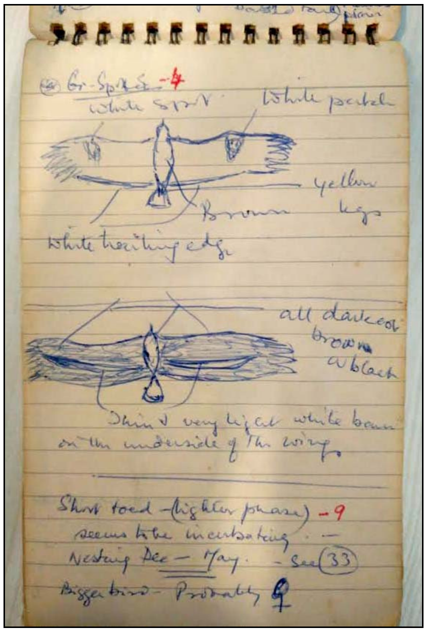
While quaffing the refreshing beverage, other members were seen coming in and soon the café was half-full of BSAPians. Someone then announced that the jeeps had arrived and, a few minutes later, a white government Ambassador drove up with our society President, Mr. Pushp Kumar and Maj. A. A. Aziz inside. Having exchanged pleasantries, we climbed into the jeeps, and started off for our field trip for that day, the Vanasthalipuram Deer Park (now called the Mahavir Harina Vanasthali). The date was the 20th of February, **1983**!

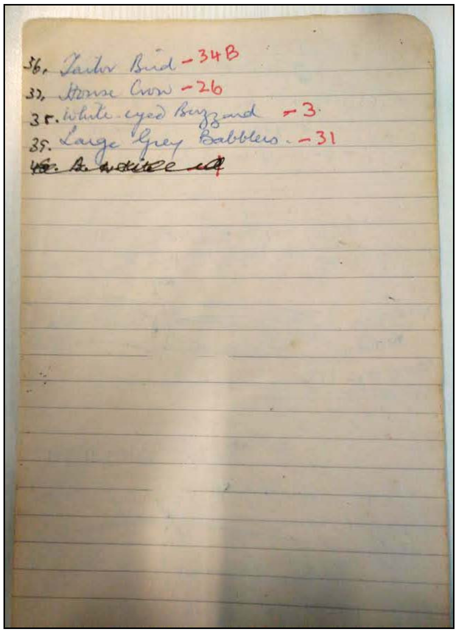
Below is the field list of this trip…


TRIP TO:- VANASTHALIPURAM-
DATE :- 20th FEB: 1983 TIME:- 08 15 HRS
WEATHER:- Clear skies. Bright sun. No breeze. Warm during the day, getting to hot & dry.
TEMP:- ——
HABITAT:- Flame of the forest in full bloom. Dear Scrubland - Grass dry. A few short trees, some still retaining the greenness. No water in the natural pond.
BIRDS SIGHTED:-
1. Rosy Pastor - eclipse plumage 5-6 -29
2. ~~white headed~~ Babblers - Jungle -32
3. Ashy wren Warbler -34
4. Blyth's Reed Warbler -35
5. Sunbird - Purplerumped -37
6. Ringed Dove - 2 -14
7. Brahminy Myna - 23
8. Indian Roller -18
9. RWLW - 2 flying -12
10. IDRA -29
YWLW - 13


11. Shrike - ? Probably Rufousbacked ✓ -21
12. R.V. Bulbul -30 also a nest in a bu
13. R. R-Parakeet -16
14. Black Drongo -22
100's of Rosy Pastors -24 in full colour on the flame of the forest trees. The ones seen earlier - probably ♀'s or Juv.
15. Common Myna -25
16. Crow Pheasant - Heard -17
17. Pied Bush Chat - ♀ -36
18. Egyptian Vulture -7
19. Small Indian Skylark -19
20. Jungle Crow -27
——
- P.R. Sunbird - ♂ seen again.
Rosy Pastors feeding on the FOTF flowers
——
21. Baybacked Shrike -20
22. Small Minivet -28
23. Grey Partridge -10
24. B.W. Kite -1
25. Whitebacked Vulture -6B


26. Longbilled Vulture -6
A whole group of several Vultures flying at a distance. Some birds have come closer. Includes all the 3 species - LB, WB;
——
27. Indian Wren Warbler -33
(28) Ashy (Grey) Wren Warbler?
29. Common Quail -? -11
30. L-B. Dove -15
31. Montagu's Harrier ♂ - 2 light pht. -8
— Rufousbacked Shrike - ✓ -21
32. Pariah kite -2
33. Short-toed Eagle -9 ~~[illegible]~~ ♀? A nest on a flame of the forest tree
(~~Dark Phase~~)
2 birds seen both ♂ & ♀
34. Black or King Vulture -5
35. Spotted Eagle -? Greater? -4
streaked brown
Dark wing
brown on white
Black beak
White
White underwing + body. - barred tail
Flanks plain
(33)


(35) Gr-Spt-E. -4
white spot
White patch
yellow legs
Brown
white trailing edge
all dark or brown & black
Shining very light white band on the underside of the wing.
——
Short toed (lighter phase) -9
seems to be incubating. —
Nesting Dec — May. - See (33)
Bigger bird - Probably ♀


36. Tailor Bird -34B
37. House Crow -26
38. White-eyed Buzzard -3
39. Large Grey Babblers -31
~~40. A. whitee~~

The highlight of the trip was the huge flocks of Rosy Pastors (now the Rosy Starling *Pastor roseus*). The flowering Flame of the Forest trees in this Deer Park were favourite feeding grounds for the beautiful birds and flocks of several hundreds were a common sight. Also interesting are the sightings of the two species of *Gyps*, the King or Black (*Sarcogyps*) and the Egyptian (*Neophron*) Vulture. These were also very common in those days and at that place particularly, because of the municipal garbage dump just outside the boundary wall of the Park.

The trip ended with hot *chai* and biscuits served by the Forest Department staff at the park. There used to be a lovely open-air sitting area just outside the park gates and we always forgathered there after our trips to this location. While refreshing ourselves with the soothing oolong and the contents of our snack boxes, the field trip list was read out by Kulkarni. Others pitched in with their sightings, the combined total coming to some 40 species.

After discussions of the species sighted, and after deciding the site for the next field trip, we called it a day and, climbing back into the jeeps, we returned to the Kamat Hotel, where the faithful bus (route No. 127) brought us back home in time for a late lunch, or an early high-tea. But the tea was, unhappily, not for me. It seems that the circumstances of the rotting teeth are different when one is out for birding and when one is back at home. Still, two cups of tea for a day is not bad going, at my age (I was pushing 13)!

Note: Several names may be unfamiliar to the younger set of birders. I suggest that readers use the following publications to identify the species:

1. Compact Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan by Salim Ali and S. Dillon Ripley
2. A Synopsis of the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent by S. Dillon Ripley

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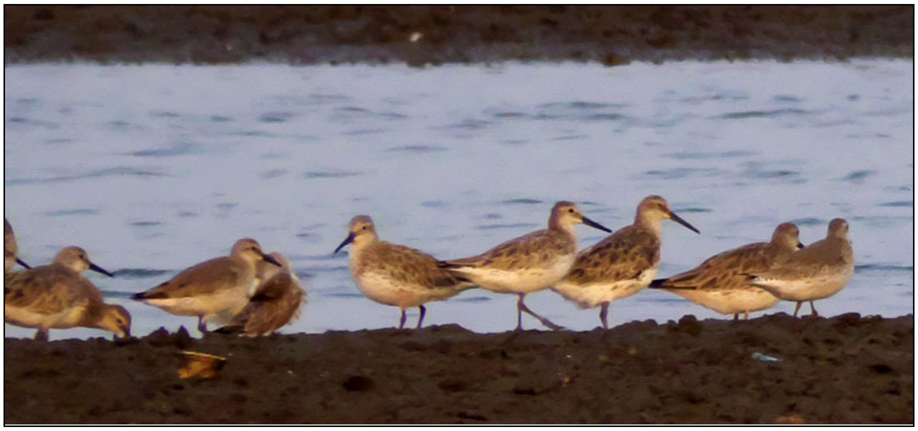
Report: Sighting of Great Knot, Kakinada, 7th January 2017

Text & Photo: Gurukumar KR



Great Knot flock

The annual wetland census has been an exciting time for me ever since I joined BSAP. The variety and sheer numbers of the migratory birds can amaze any birding enthusiast. This year was no different and when presented with a chance to participate in AWC in Kakinada area, I just could not let the opportunity pass. Though I had been told about the huge flocks of migratory birds that one could see in such a habitat, I was definitely not prepared for such a visual treat!

The East Godavari River and Estuarine Ecosystem is rich in floral and faunal diversity and forms an important feeding and breeding ground and a nursery for a wide variety of animals and birds. The census was on for three days and during this time one of the areas visited was the Kumbabhishekam fish landing area near Kakinada port. In this area the mudflats were being developed into a port, and a lot of boats and fishing activity was seen. On what remained untouched or less disturbed, there was lot of bird activity and among them was a huge flock of Great Knots (*Calidris tenuirostris*).

The Great Knot is a small wader and the largest of the Calidris species. These birds migrate in huge flocks to southern Asia during winters from their breeding habitats of north-eastern Siberia. They have short dark legs and a medium-length thin, dark bill. The face, throat and breast are heavily spotted, contrasting with the white of the belly. The larger size of the bird and its bill, along with the strong streaking on the throat and breast, helps in distinguishing it from its more common cousin, the Red Knot (*Calidris cantus*). These species forage on the mudflats and beaches looking for insects and molluscs, picking them up by sight. They are usually seen roosting with other waders.

The flock seen at the port area was a huge mix of Grey Plovers (*Pluvialis squatarola*), Whimbrels (*Numenius phaeopus*) and Eurasian Curlews (*Numenius arquata*). The Great Knots are listed as endangered by the IUCN and the diminishing of their feeding areas like these mudflats, does not seem to help in their conservation.

Other birds that were seen in the same area were Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*), Lesser Sand Plover (*Charadrius mongolus*), Kentish Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*), Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*), Brown-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus brunnicephalus*), Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*), House Crow (*Corvus splendens*), Pacific Golden Plover (*Pluvialis fulva*), Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*), Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*), Terek Sandpiper (*Xenus cinereus*), and Brahminy Kite (*Haliastur indus*).

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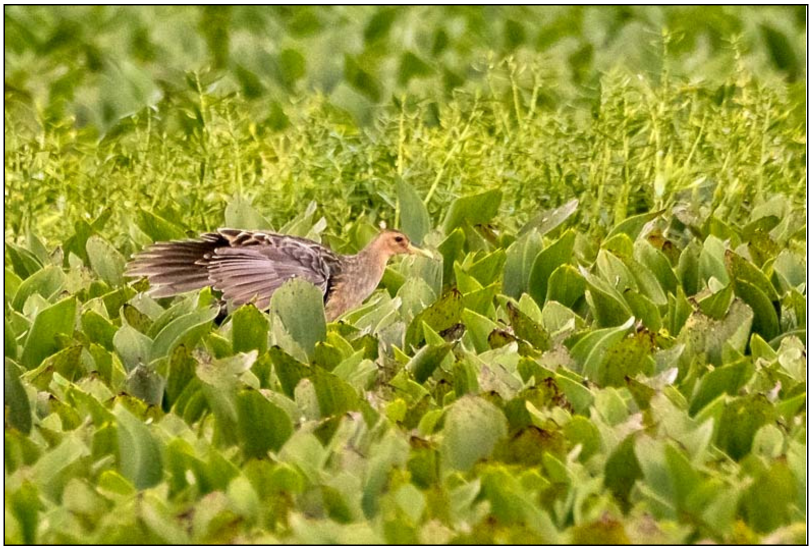
Report: Sighting of Watercock, Fox Sagar, Hyderabad, 23rd July 2017

Text & Photo: Sudipta Bhattacharya



Watercock (female)

The scientific name of the Watercock is *Gallicrex cinerea*. It belongs to the Rallidae family of crakes and rails. The Watercock is a widespread resident but basically a summer visitor to the Indian subcontinent. It is the only member of genus *Gallicrex*. The male is significantly different from the female. Female birds have buff underparts with fine barring, and buff fringes to dark brown upperparts, and are usually around 35 cm in length. The males are 42 cm, and have grey-black plumage with an extended red frontal shield and a red 'horn'.

The BSAP monthly outing to Fox Sagar Lake, Hyderabad on July 23, 2017, was an eventful day as a Watercock (female) was seen after a long spell of time. It was interesting to watch how the Watercock was chasing the local inhabitants – the Purple Swamphens.

Habitat: The Watercock inhabits reedbeds, wetlands, marshes, swamps, flooded pasture, flooded meadows, irrigated lands and flooded agricultural field. The picture below of the female Watercock was taken in marshes of Fox Sagar Lake.

Food Habits: The Watercock feeds on small fish, invertebrates, aquatic insects, terrestrial insects, worms and mollusks. It searches for food with its bill in shallow water.

Breeding: The breeding season of the Watercock in the Indian subcontinent is mainly during June to September, and nesting starts just after the rainy season. In one clutch, the female Watercock lays 3 to 6 eggs.

Movement: Watercocks are mostly resident. However they move locally for foraging and breeding. Northern Watercocks in China and Japan usually move south during winter.

Concerns: The global population of Watercocks has never been quantified; however, the overall population is decreasing due to habitat loss. Still it is not considered as a Vulnerable species due to fairly widespread presence. The clearing of reeds around wetlands and ever-expanding agricultural activities are the main threats for the survival of the Watercock.

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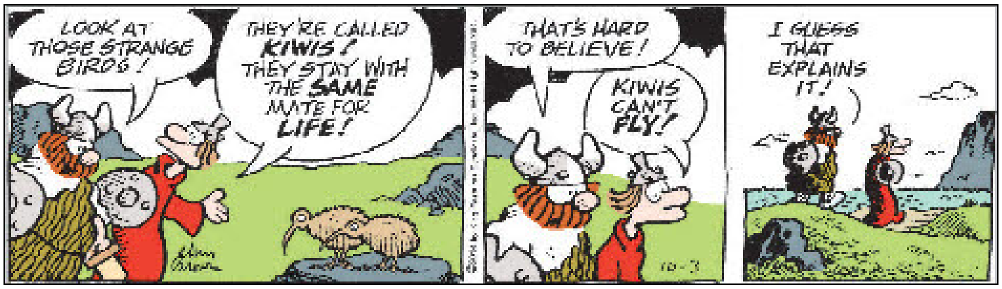
Bird Humour

Umesh Mani

HAGAR THE HORRIBLE


LOOK AT THOSE STRANGE BIRDS!
THEY'RE CALLED KIWIS! THEY STAY WITH THE SAME MATE FOR LIFE!
THAT'S HARD TO BELIEVE!
KIWIS CAN'T FLY!
I GUESS THAT EXPLAINS IT!
10-3

(From Deccan Herald, 11-03-2015)

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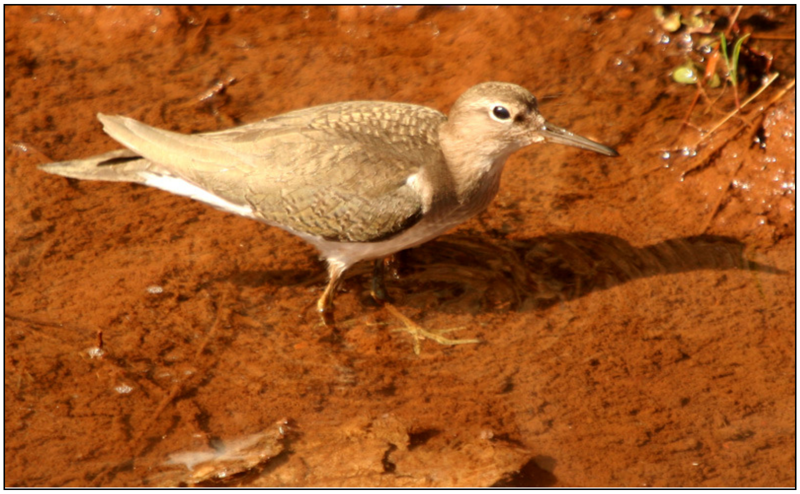
Bird of the Month

Text and Photo: Umesh Mani

Green Sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*)



Green Sandpiper (Ankola, Karnataka, 15-01-2012)

Order:	Charadriiformes
Family:	Scolopacidae
Genus:	*Tringa*
Species:	*T. ochropus*
Size:	21-24cm

Description & distribution: A somewhat plump member of the *Tringa* genus, the Green Sandpiper is a small migratory wader that breeds in sub-Arctic Europe, and winters in southern Europe, the Indian subcontinent, south-east Asia and tropical Africa.

The genus *Tringa* was named by Aldrovandus in 1599 based on the Ancient Greek *trungas*, which was a white-rumped, tail-bobbing wader earlier mentioned by Aristotle. The Green Sandpiper, and its only other close relative, the Solitary Sandpiper (*T. solitaria*) of North America, are, interestingly, the only members of the large Scolopacidae family of waders that nest in trees.

The Green Sandpiper is dark greenish-brown on the back and wings, with variable light or whitish spots that are most abundant in the breeding adult, and less so in non-breeding and younger birds. It has a greyish head and breast, with a delicate contrasting neck and chest pattern, white underparts, and dark green legs and bill. The crown and breast are heavily streaked in the breeding adult. In flight, besides the easily-seen dark upper- and under-wings, contrasting with the white belly and vent, it has a brilliant white rump that is conspicuous and a diagnostic feature that distinguishes it from the otherwise similar Solitary Sandpiper. It is darker and less heavily-spotted than the Wood Sandpiper (*T. glareola*), and the white supercilium is indistinct or absent behind the eye. The juvenile has browner upperparts with buff spotting.

Habitat & behaviour: The Green Sandpiper is primarily a freshwater bird, and often frequents smaller waterbodies like village ponds that other waders may avoid due to their preference for a clear all-round view. It is also seen along rivers, freshwater estuarine channels, and irrigation pools. It is not a very sociable species, usually seen singly, though small numbers may occasionally congregate if they come across a suitable feeding ground.

Its diet mainly consists of small invertebrates, though it has been known to take insect and mosquito larvae, worms, molluscs, crustaceans, dragonfly nymphs, beetles, etc. The bill is thin and not very long, and enables it to probe the mud and pick small invertebrates as it steadily covers ground along the edges of ponds or lakes. Foraging methods have been found to vary depending on the specific habitat.

The basic call of the Green Sandpiper is a three-note *tuee-weet-weet* call, uttered usually in flight; it also utters a ringing *tluee-tueet* call.

Nesting: The Green Sandpiper usually nests in old nests of other birds in trees. The usual clutch consists of 2 pointed oval eggs, off-white or cream, spotted with dark brown.

Local name: The Green Sandpiper is known as *'nalla ulanka'* in Telugu,*'aathuchuzhi ullan'* in Tamil, *'shwetapoonch thuthvari'* in Gujarati and *'hara retal chaha'* in Punjabi.

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For Private Circulation Only

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For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online. **Website:** www.bsap.in. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Annual: 500 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Corporate: 2000 per annum; Life: 3000. (*Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)*